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**I Need *MORE* Help!": Ontario's Rise in Demand for Special Education**

By

Brittany L. Guenot

A Major Research Paper

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

through the Faculty of Education

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Education

at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2020

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**I Need *MORE* Help!": Ontario's Rise in Demand for Special Education**

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September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020

## **DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

According to regulation 298 of the *Ontario Education Act* (1990), a primary role of educators is to ‘effectively’ instruct the students they have been assigned. It is my understanding that ‘effective’ teaching is more than simply giving the lesson of the day that aligns with the curriculum. As a teacher, I try to support my pupils’ learning by taking into consideration the best possible way to serve their diverse abilities. Furthermore, I acknowledge that students may require personalized and tailored school supports in order to fully benefit from their educational experience. In my own practice, I have utilized special education programs and services as resources to individualize my pedagogy. That said, working in the realm of special education has its challenges. This major paper has the purpose of exploring these barriers while understanding special education as a growing tool to cater to the diversity of students in 20<sup>th</sup> century classrooms.

*Keywords:* special education, core French, individual education plans, resources, demand

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## CHAPTER 1

### Ontario's Rise in Demand for Special Education

In the province of Ontario, there are four publicly funded school systems administered by district school boards and school authorities: English Public, English Catholic, French Public & French Catholic (Ontario Association of School Districts International, 2020). In 2018-2019, over two million students were registered in publicly funded schools across the province (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2020a). To embrace student diversity, Ontario's education system emphasizes that students be presented with educational strategies that are both *equitable* and *inclusive* with the intention of reaching every student (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). It is my understanding that special education is a cornerstone to creating an education system that is both equitable and inclusive; therefore, its programs and services play a crucial role in fostering a learning environment that provides every student with the opportunity to reach their full potential.

In the last 20 years, a significant amount of research (e.g., Clandfield, 2014; National Center of Education Statistics, 2020; Powell, 2006; Weintraub, 2012) has denoted a growth in the population of students accessing Special Education Services (SES). The purpose of this critical review of the relevant literature is to gain a better understanding of the nature of special education in Ontario, the associated challenges of supporting special education needs (SEN) in an inclusive and equitable environment, and to discuss ways in which to promote the success of students with SENs within the general classroom, particularly in the core French school system in southern Ontario. For the purpose of this major paper, Ontario's Special Needs Population (SNP) will refer to pupils who are formally identified by the Identification, Placement and Review Committee (IPRC) and those who are unidentified accessing SES. The majority of this based on

research literature derived from the following databases: *ProQuest, ERIC, EBSCO, Sage Journals, Science Direct, Exceptionality Education, International, Google Scholar, National Center for Education Statistics, Taylor & Francis, JSTOR, Western Libraries.*

### **Present Study**

The results of numerous studies have suggested that there is more diversity in classrooms now than ever before (e.g., Bennett, 2009; Lawrence-Brown, 2004). My time as an educator has taught me that it is not uncommon to see a room full of students, each having their own personal learning needs or styles. As the individual needs of today's learners expand, so does the realm of special education.

### **Special Education on the Rise in Ontario**

In the 2010-2011 academic year there were 191,600 students identified through the IPRC process and another 127,600 students who were not formally identified as being exceptional but were provided special education programs and services (Asperger's Canada, n.d). However, in the 2014-2015 school year, which are the most recent figures available, more than 178,500 students were identified by an IPRC as exceptional pupils, and 162,000 students were not formally identified but were provided with special education programs and services (Ontario's Ministry of Education, 2017a). The variation between the 2010-2011 and the 2014-2015 school years suggest that there was a surge of roughly 21,300 students using special education services during that time. One possible explanation for this increase could be that registration in Ontario's publicly funded schools was higher between those two years, thereby leading to an increase in the number of exceptional pupils. Yet, according to Ontario's Ministry of Education (2016c) in 2010-2011, there were approximately 2,051,865 students enrolled in Public and Roman Catholic Schools while in 2014-2015 there were 2,003,237 (Ontario's Ministry of Education, 2016c). Therefore, increased

enrolment is unlikely to be the sole factor to explain the rise in demand for special education programs and services.

### ***Where is the Increase?***

In order to gain a better understanding as to why there is an increased demand for special education programs and services, I think it is important to consider where exactly we are seeing the increase. For the purpose of this major paper, I have investigated the following three areas of interest: 1. Level of education; 2. Type of identification (unidentified vs identified pupil); and, 3. Type of classroom.

**Elementary versus Secondary.** According to *People for Education (2019)*, the higher demand for special education appears to be more prominent in secondary schools compared to elementary schools. *People for Education* is a Canadian organization that provides research for advancing public education standards and advocacy for all young people to have equal chances of educational success (People for Education, About Us section). Every year, the charity releases a report based on surveys filled out by parents and teachers across the province of Ontario relating to a variety of topics such as parent involvement, citizenship education, health, and special education (People for Education, 2020). Their 2019 Education Annual Report on Ontario's publicly funded schools was based on survey results from 1244 schools in 70 of Ontario's 72 school boards. According to the report, an average of 17% of elementary school students and 27% of secondary students received special education supports. However, in their 2013 report it was noted that only 17% of elementary students and 23% of secondary students received special education services (People for Education, 2019). Furthermore, in 2001, only 11% of elementary students and 14% of secondary students received some form of special education assistance

(People for Education, 2013). Data from earlier years regarding Ontario’s special education population in elementary versus secondary schools showed a similar trend (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Students with Special Needs in Ontario Public Schools 2001-02, 2005-06, and 2007-08*

Academic Years	Elementary	Secondary	All Special Education
2001-02 Special Needs	176,352	100,506	276,858
2001-02 % of all	13.36%	14.89%	13.88%
2005-06 Special Needs	175,587	115,138	290,725
2005-06 % of all	12.64%	16.13%	13.82%
2009-10 Special Needs	176,228	130,792	307,020
2009-10 % of all	14.46%	19.13%	13.80%

Source: Ministry of Education, as cited in Clandfield, 2014.

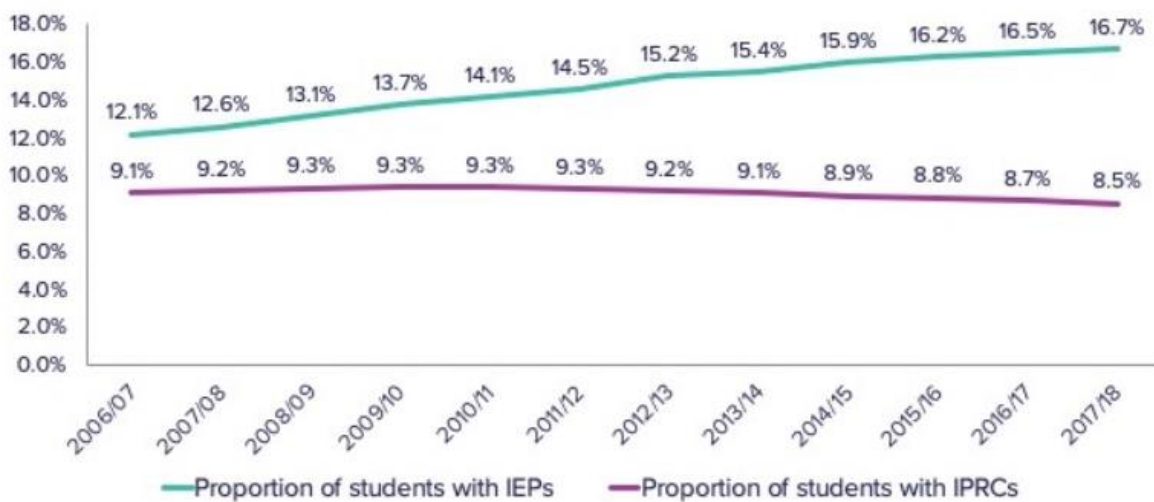
As can be shown in Table 1, although the percentage of special education students has remained relatively consistent at the elementary level, there has been more variation at the secondary level. This data suggests a growth specifically in secondary schools. One possible explanation for these differences according to Clandfield (2014) is that “the percentages are higher in secondary schools because many students in the elementary panel are not identified in the lower grades” (p. 130). Although I tried to obtain these statistics from school boards other than the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), these numbers were not available in several Special Education Reports.

**Identified versus Non-Identified/Unidentified.** Students do not necessarily have to be formally identified as an exceptional pupil to receive special education programs and/or special education services (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017a). In fact, in some Ontario school boards, it has been noted that few students are formally identified and yet receive special education support through an Individual Education Report (IEP) (Demeris et al., 2007). That being

said, some research (e.g., Bennett, 2009; Demeris et al., 2007; Learning disabilities Association of Ontario, 2014) has suggested that formally identified students are not necessarily the reason for the increase in students accessing special education services and supports. Clandfield (2014), argued that a growing number of students without formal identification have been accessing SES through an IEP since the year 2000. As shown in Figure 1, the amount of students with an IEP has steadily increased 2006-2007 while the proportion of students being formally identified has remained stable (People of Education, 2019).

**Figure 1**

*Proportion of Students with IEPs and IPRCs in Ontario Public Schools 2006-07 to 2017-18*



Adapted from People for Education. (2019). Annual Report on Ontario’s Publicly Funded Schools 2019. Retrieved April 30, 2020 from <https://peopleforeducation.ca/report/2019-annual-report-on-schools-what-makes-a-school/>.

The special education reports for the Halton District School Board suggests the same trend. In the 2017-2018 report, 2,521 students were identified at the elementary level and 2,018 at the secondary level. An additional 4,332 at the elementary level and 2,204 at the secondary level were



not identified but had school-based IEPs. This means a total of 6,853 students at the elementary level and 4,222 students at the secondary level had access to SES (Halton District School Board, 2018). In the most recent report (2019-2020), 2,409 of students were identified at the elementary level and 1,968 at the secondary level. An additional 4,778 students at the elementary level and, 2,710 at the secondary level were not identified, but had school-based IEPs. This means a total of 7, 187 students at the elementary level and 4,678 students at the secondary level had access to SES (Halton District School Board, 2020). Although there was a decline in students formally identified, the number of non-identified students went up, increasing the overall number of students accessing SES.

Furthermore, the data I put forth in the section *Special Education on the Rise in Ontario* of this major paper also supports the idea that more students without an identification are using special education services compared to those with a formal identification. When looking at comparable Canadian provinces regarding the provision of special education services, the province of Alberta, for example, recognizes that not all students should have to receive a special education code (i.e., identification) in order to receive SES (Alberta Education, 2013). In fact, some studies have shown that it is the students that do not have a formal code that are receiving more support than those who do such as access to an educational assistants, consulting teachers and resource programs (e.g., McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013).

Examining how Ontario's special education funding is being used could also be an indicator that it is the number of unidentified students that is on the rise. Cardius, an independent research foundation, located in Hamilton, Ontario, studies areas such as health, religion, and education. When researching education, one resource the charity reviews is the Office of the Auditor General Report of Ontario that records provincial government financial audits. In a review

of the data from the 2010 Ontario's Auditor General report on funding for school boards, it was noted that the majority of students receiving special education support were formally identified (68%) versus non-identified (32%) (Auditor General Report Ontario, 2010). However, in the 2012-2013 school year, the percentage of funding that went to students who had been formally identified as exceptional by an IPRC dropped to 56%, which then declined further to 52% in the 2014-2015 school year (Deani et al, 2019). On the other hand, during this same time period, the percentage of students receiving special education needs funding that had not been formally identified continued to rise. These data strongly suggest that while the overall number of formally identified students has been decreasing over the last decade, the number of non-identified students has been increasing.

**Regular Classroom versus Special Education Classroom.** Across Canada, most provinces value inclusion as the model of choice for education (Bennett, 2009; McGhie-Richmond et al, 2013; Mazurek & Winzer, 2010). The Council of Ministers of Education in Canada stated that an inclusive education is believed to make all students feel as though they belong and that they contribute to a class and a school (CMEC, 2008), regardless of their diversity such as a disability (Loreman, 2010). Inclusion also means that the *regular* classroom teacher is responsible for all students in their class including those with exceptionalities (Buch and Valeo, 2004). In Ontario, the IPRC committee considers integrating a student with an exceptionality in a *regular* classroom before a special education classroom (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Therefore, it is not surprising that general classroom teachers are the ones to most likely see an increase in students with special needs (Weintraub, 2012).

Data from the Toronto District School Board confirm this assumption. Since 2007 to 2012, the number of students with exceptionalities (excluding Gifted) in special education classes has

declined from approximately 10,000 to 9,000, with a corresponding increase in identified students in regular classrooms from about 6,000 to 7,000 (Clandfield, 2014). Different school boards, such as the Durham District School Board (DDSB), the Greater Essex County District School Board (GECDSB), and the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) share the belief that most students with special education needs can be supported in a regular classroom (DDSB, 2019; GECDSB, 2019; TVDSB, 2019). As stated in the annual special education plan for DDSB: “a regular classroom provides opportunity for students to be with peers, while receiving personalized programming that is outlined in the student’s Individual Education Plan” (DDSB, 2019, p. 6).

### ***Why is the Special Education Population Growing?***

An array of components could explain the expansion of students receiving special education assistance. For one, specific legislative developments in the field of special education have played a role in the augmentation of students who have access to special education resources (SER). For instance, SES have been extended beyond only those students identified with exceptionalities to students who have not been identified with an exceptionality.

The broadening of the special education lexicon could be another contributing component. Specifically, terms such as ‘students with special needs’ (Clandfield, 2014; Demeris et al., 2007; Gregory, 2015; Liu, 2015), ‘exceptional students’ (Clandfield, 2014; Gregory, 2015; Wise, 2012) and ‘student with disability’ (Gregory, 2015) have all been used in the literature to indicate students (formally or not) receiving special education programs or services through an IEP. Variability in terminology raises two important questions: 1. What needs are defined as ‘special’ or ‘exceptional’ (Vehmas, 2010; Wilson, 2002)? and 2. Does the lack of consistency in the usage of these terms lead to more students falling under the special education umbrella?

Furthermore, educators' attitudes towards the IEP itself could also be contributing to the increase in students with special education needs: "When faced with challenges in knowing what to do for a student who was struggling or had some type of diagnosis that suggested learning would be problematic, the easy solution was to put them on an IEP" (Gregory, 2015, p. 11). Similarly, in a qualitative study of three general classroom elementary school teachers regarding the teacher's responses to the needs of students with special learning needs, one participant admitted: "we put way too many kids on IEPs nowadays" (Liu, 2015, p. 40).

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Literature Review**

#### **History of Special Education in Ontario**

Nowadays, education is said to be a right, not a privilege. However, this was not always the case. At one time, formal education was intended only for selected portion of the population (Andrews & Lupart, 2000). Children with disabilities were in most cases excluded from school and thrown in the same residential institutions as people living in poverty, people who are mentally ill, and/or orphans (Winzer, 2008).

**Figure 2**

*Tracing the Development of Special Education in Canada*



Adapted from Loreman. 2010. Essential Inclusive Education-Related outcomes for Alberta Pre-service Teachers – Alberta, *Journal of education research*, 56(2).

Tracing back more than 50 years, special education has come a long way. Since the 1950s, Ontario’s education system has gradually headed away from a medical model towards a model of inclusion. Major changes have been made in regards to policies and procedures, such as institutionalization, segregation, categorization, integration, mainstreaming, and inclusion of students.

The first significant change made in special education within Ontario occurred in the 1950s with the implementation of the Hope Report. Also known as the Royal Commission on Learning

Report, this document had the purpose of providing a general overview of Ontario's education system; specifically examining areas such as teacher training, school administration, education finance and special education (Radical Reforms, 2020). An expansion of special education programs was put forth as a way to render equitable learning opportunities for all students, including those with special education needs. In the 1960s, Canadian educators began to rethink the segregation system of education based on categories of disability (Loreman, 2014).

During the 1970s, the policies and reforms that were designed in the 1960s were implemented. Children with special needs were integrated into regular schools and expected to perform well with only minimal supports, as SES were still lacking. Additional changes within Ontario classrooms included the introduction to new teaching techniques, such as the use of the IEP, which gave way to the concept of the 'open classroom'. Although there were school boards that offered special education programs and services, doing so was not yet mandatory according to the Ontario government (Loreman, 2014). The 1970s to 1980s was the integration mainstreaming period, where special education followed an identification process in order to determine the placement of the student with special needs. However, delays in application, high cost services, and disagreements regarding identification and placement were a few problems that would give way to inclusive education (Brown & Andrews, 2014).

In the 1980s, special education made great strides as an *Act to Amend, the Education Act* (S. O. 1986, c. 21) came into effect. This legislation, which is also known as Bill 82, required the provision of special education programs and services to students in need, regardless of disabilities. Furthermore, school boards had the responsibility of offering an Early Identification Program to identify the learning needs of students as well as the supports needed to help with the development and growth (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). In the 1990s, the province of

Ontario continued to demonstrate its commitment to improving special education by establishing the *1995 Report of the Royal Commission on Learning, For the Love of Learning*. Key recommendations of this document relating to special education included: the integration of students with special needs into regular classrooms, providing assistance to students in need without the requirement of a formal identification, appropriate use of the term ‘learning disabled’, and acceleration for gifted students (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013).

Moving into the 21st century, the arena of special education continued to evolve. In 2001, the *Special Education Information Handbook* (1984) was replaced with an updated document from the Ministry of Education called *Special Education: A Guide for Educators* (2001), which explored topics including special education funding, programs, services, legislation, and policies. In the years that followed, other documents were released to better support students with special education needs and teachers, which included, but were not limited to: *Individual Education Plan: A Resource Guide* (2004); *Education for All* (2005); *Special Education Transformation Report* (2006); and more recently, *Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools* (2014).

### **Individual Education Plan (IEP)**

In the province of Ontario, students who are receiving special education programs and services do so through an IEP (Demeris et al, 2007). The term refers to both the educational program a student will follow, as well as the legal written document describing said program (Tremblay & Belley, 2017). This document, which is known as the IEP in Ontario, is referred to by different terms in other provinces/territories, such as the Individualized Program Plan (IPP), the Special Education Plan (SEP), the Individual Support Services Plan (ISSP), and the Student Support Plan (SSP) (CADDAC, 2020; Mattatall, 2011). Researchers have also referred to the IEP as the ‘back bone’, the ‘core’, a ‘key element’, and the ‘heart and soul’ of special education

(Bateman & Linden, 1998; Brigham et al., 2009; Mitchel et al., 2010) noting it as an integral part in special needs education (Tremblay & Belley, 2017).

In Ontario, there is no one universal format for the IEP; however, there are basic requirements that must be included in this legal working document. As stated in the Ontario Regulation 181/98, subsections 6(2)-6(8), 7(4)-7(7), and section 8, a student's IEP must include: "specific educational expectations for the pupil; and a statement of the methods by which the pupil's progress will be reviewed" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000, p. 24). The IEP may also, but is not required to, include other elements such as a statement about the methods used to review progress or a transition plan to post-secondary school activities, such as work and further education for students 14 and older (York Region District School Board, n.d.).

Although a student who has been identified by the IPRC requires the implementation of an IEP, a plan can be developed for a student that has not been formally identified, but who requires a special education program and/or services. There are five categories of exceptionalities: Behaviour; Communication (autism, deaf and hard of hearing, language impairment, learning disability); Intellectual (giftedness, mild intellectual disability, developmental disability); Physical (blind and low vision); and Multiple (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004).

### ***IEP Procedure***

Most provinces within Canada share a similar procedure when identifying an exceptional student (Brown & Andrews, 2014). In Ontario, the process used to identify and determine a placement for a student is set out by the Ontario Regulation 181/98 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016a). Although the requirements for the formal identification of students can vary amongst school boards (Brown et al., 2016; Demeris et al., 2007), most special education documents across



the province tend to share the same premise and procedural components (Gregory, 2015). Based on my review of the existing literature and legislation, the following is my understanding of the steps required to develop an IEP. In addition to the following steps, some schools have additional steps prior to the IPRC, such as a school-based team meeting (SBTM) to first informally address the needs of a student. First, there is preliminary work completed, such as accommodation(s)/differentiated instruction, indirect or direct learning support teacher (LST) support, and some form of assessment and/or documentation that can identify learning and behavioral challenges. Once a concern has been identified, a formal meeting is requested by the parent or school, with the school's IPRC. Note that depending on the school, the name for the committee may vary. The IPRC committee is made up of at least three people, one of which, must be the principal or board supervisory officer. Typically, another member of the committee is the resource teacher or special education staff member and it could also include the regular classroom teacher (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017b).

Prior to the meeting, the IPRC will provide the student with an educational assessment, that is typically criterion based, in order to examine the student's academic performance. These tests provide an idea as to whether the student is keeping up with the curriculum standards for their grade level (TDSB, 2019). During this meeting, members may discuss a variety of topics, such as the student's strengths and needs, assessment results, observations made by a parent(s) or teacher(s), or a review of any relevant medical information like a hearing problem that may help in providing a complete profile of the student (CADDAC, 2020). Once this information has been gathered, reviewed by the committee, and deemed sufficient, an educational plan can be put forth and a non-identified IEP may be developed. However, if the information is insufficient, further assessments may be requested. According to the 2004 *Individual Education Plan Resource Guide*,

other assessments can include, but are not limited to, psychological assessments, speech-language assessments, and/or psychiatric/behavioral assessments (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004). From there, the IPRC determines if a student should be identified as exceptional, their type of exceptionality, and suggests one of the following: placement in a regular classroom with indirect service, resource assistance or withdrawal assistance; or placement in a partially or fully integrated special education class (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007; York Region District School Board, n.d.).

With parents/guardians as well as the student on board, within 30 days of being identified as exceptional by the committee, an IEP must be developed (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017b). The IEP is typically reviewed three times a year at the elementary level and each semester at the secondary level (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004). Parents/guardians receive a copy of the IEP, and in my experience may also receive additional resources, such as a comprehensive brochure and an IEP Guide for Parents depending on the school board they are in. If parents/guardians disagree with the placement decision made by the IPRC committee, they may appeal it. Within 30 days of the appeal, the Special Education Appeal Board (SEAB) will meet, review the information, and make a recommendation regarding the identification and placement of the student. If parents are still not in agreement with the recommendations, they may appeal to the Ontario Special Education Tribunal, which then makes the final decision (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017b; Ottawa-Carlton District School Board, 2019).

### **Special Education Challenges**

“There’s always room for improvement” (Unknown, n.d.); the realm of special education in Ontario is no exception to this rule of thumb. For the purpose of this paper, I will address some of the most poignant concerns regarding special education and the rise in its demand.

### *Pre-Service Training*

“While the numbers and diversity of students with disabilities served by general educators has increased, I do not see sufficient change in the belief systems or in the way general educators are being prepared” (Weintraub, 2012, p. 52). Yet, studies such as LeRoy and Simpson (1996) suggest that the more experience a teacher has with special education learning needs the more confident they become. That said, although teachers often assume that their university teacher education programs will prepare them to work with students that have special education needs, a lack of specific training on working with students with exceptionalities remains a major concern (Bennett, 2009). Various studies, such as Avramidis et al., (2000); Cook (2002); Mullen (2001); Titone (2005); and McGhie-Richmond et al., (2013) have suggested that general classroom teachers feel their preservice teacher programs do not adequately prepare them to teach to the various needs of their students. Research by Sharma, et al. (2015) and Specht, et al. (2016) found that pre-service teachers with firsthand exposure to students with special needs better applied inclusive teaching in the classroom. As a next step, researchers have suggested a more inclusive driven curriculum at the pre-service level as a way to effectively respond to the learning needs of today’s diverse learners (Massouti, 2019).

Gregory (2015) found that experienced teachers did not believe their teacher education programs adequately prepared them for either teaching students with exceptionalities or developing IEPs. In line with this finding, I have witnessed throughout my career in the school system that without proper training, it is very difficult to fully understand a student’s exceptionality and how it impacts on their learning. In a study conducted by Titone (2005), one participant stated: “Teacher’s don’t understand how [the child’s disability] affects the child as a whole. Behaviors may not only reflect a writing disability; they are also related to self-

concept...they say ‘he’s not trying’ when they don’t fully understand the disability, even though on an intellectual level they may understand” (p. 18). Therefore, it follows that adequate training is key in understanding a child with special education needs.

### ***Inclusion and Special Education***

A teacher once told me “inclusion without supports is abandonment” (Unknown, n.d.). As we strive as a province for the inclusive education of all students in the general classroom, regardless of their particular learning characteristics and needs, supports are *key*. In special education, these supports can be human, material, physical, and/or social. These resources also known as learning supports, include but are not limited to access to an educational assistant (McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017b), resource programs (McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013), preferred seating, assistive technology, specific teaching strategies, and/or individualized assessment strategies.

As stated in the ETFO Submission to the *Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs 2019 Pre-Budget Hearings*: “Integrating students with special needs into Ontario classrooms requires more resources to support both the students and the classroom teacher in terms of training, human resources and material resources” (Elementary Teacher Federation of Ontario, 2019, p. 3). Although many educators recognize the important role that supports can play in helping students, there remains a significant lack of sufficient supports within the classroom (Avramidis et al., 2000; McGhie-Richmond et al., 2013). In 2016, the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario (LDAO) identified a lack of resources as the reason that some schools were unable to provide programs and services referred to in their special education policies. Furthermore, the Ontario Human Right Commission (2018) listed the following as barriers to the education of students with disabilities: 1. Long waiting lists for professional assessments; 2. Large

backlog in the processing of claims for special education funding; and 3. Delays in the provision of special education programs and services.

In the 2015-2016 *Report of the Panel on the Status of Public Education in Newfoundland and Labrador*, the lack of sufficient school personnel was raised as a major issue when tending to the special education needs of students. The report stated that there was a need to increase resources, such as instructional resource teachers, school counselors, education psychologists, speech language pathologist, and student assistants (Sheppard & Anderson, 2016). The case appears to be no different in Ontario. In its 2017 annual survey of elementary and secondary schools in Ontario, *People for Education*, reported that 61% of elementary schools and 50% of secondary schools were lacking access to a psychologist. Furthermore, 47% of elementary schools and 36% of secondary schools indicated that child and youth worker services were not available (People for Education, 2017). In concordance with these findings, ETFO (2019) stated that there was a substantial need for increased provincial funding for educational assistants, psychologists, behavioral therapists, school support counselors, child and youth workers, and speech-language pathologists.

In line with these statements from ETFO (2019), McGhie-Richmond et al (2013), noted that “there are too many kids and not enough support to help them” (p. 215), and that even with more supports in place, “sometimes it is impossible... when you are trying to help one person grasp the concept and your time is devoted to this person, other people may be slipping through the cracks” (p. 216). That being said, I also agree with researchers such as Avramidis et al., (2000) who argued that successful implementation of these supports is as equally important as the resources themselves.

### ***Individual Education Plans***

Research such as Christle & Yell (2010), have identified the IEP as another ‘problem area’ in special education. Some studies would suggest that one challenge of the IEP is that it is not user friendly. Specifically, Canadian teachers often find IEP goals difficult to write and use in a way that enhances student learning (Alberta, 2006). Similarly, researchers have raised several concerns regarding the IEP including its inability to adequately serve the multiple roles it is often used for (Mitchel et al., 2010; Shaddock et al., 2009), and the extent to which the documents are individualized (Stone, 1997; Brigham et al., 2004). In fact, Mattatall (2011), described them as “hard to read” and a “poor measure of progress, achievement and learning” (p. 62). These learning plans have also been critiqued as being vague and unfocused (Capizzi, 2008) or even artifacts (Rosas et al., 2009).

In Liu’s (2015) study of the perspectives and experiences of three elementary school teachers regarding IEPs, two teachers noted that they did not have enough time to work on or properly apply IEPs within their classroom, and all three discussed how the IEP made for an increased workload. In other words, too many needs in the classroom makes it difficult to support everyone. This was highlighted by one of the teachers who shared that she struggled to support all of her students in a general classroom. Furthermore, the teachers expressed feeling as though the IEP was not necessarily individualized as the strategies could be applied to all students.

### ***Testing, Assessment and, Diagnosis***

As I noted in this paper’s section entitled *IEP Procedure*, one of the steps during the identification process is the completion of a psycho-educational assessment by a psychologist. The particular measures used during these assessments varies by school boards (Clandfield, 2014); however, some of the most common measures used include: the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children; the Kaufman Test of Educational Achievement; and the Woodcock-Johnson Test of

Cognitive Abilities (TDSB, 2013). Despite the strong reliability and variability of these measures, some research (e.g., Cobb, 2013; Demazeux, 2015; Gregory, 2015; Watts, 2012) has suggested that the tests used in these assessments could be another flaw in the diagnosis and identification of students, which may in turn impacting the quality of the IEP (Blackwell and Rossetti, 2014).

Similarly, concerns have been raised regarding the usage of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), fourth edition, text revised (DSM-IV-TR; APA, 2000) and the 5th edition (DSM-V; APA, 2013) in the diagnosis of students (e.g., Clandfield, 2014; Frisby, 2020; Roy et al., 2019). The DSM defines the criteria required to make a psychiatric diagnosis. The DSM-V, which is the latest edition, shares many of the same concerns as had been identified with the fourth edition, such as biases with respect to class, gender, and race, misdiagnosis and overdiagnosis, as well as the adverse effects of labelling (Clandfield, 2014). For example, the DSM-IV-TR and the DSM-V have been criticized as discriminating against boys, and the DSM-V has been described as impossibly vague and confusing, thus making the reliance on the DSM-V for the purposes of determining school services questionable (Frances, 2012). Furthermore, Dr. Paula Caplan, a member of the DSM-IV advisory team, resigned in protest over the direction the DSM was taking in the 5<sup>th</sup> edition, and stated that “many therapists see patients through the DSM prism, trying to shoehorn a human being into a category” (Caplan, 2012, para. 12). The DSMs have also been known to be overused (Frances, 2012), and as lacking vigor or validity (Demazeux, 2015; Pickersgill, 2014; Stein, 2014). Some researchers and practitioners have argued that millions of people may have been mislabeled as having a psychiatric/mental disorder as per the DSM (Caplan, 2012; Frances, 2012; Watts, 2012) when in fact they were displaying normal everyday feelings and behaviors (Ecks, 2016; Frances, 2012; Pickersgill, 2014), such as distractibility, grief, behavioral addictions, and worries (Frances, 2012).

In her Ontario study focusing on IEP development, Gregory (2015) discussed the perspectives of Ontario elementary school teachers on the formal psychometric tests that are used to inform the development of an IEP. She stated that the two main concerns were that the tests were “outdated” and “offer[ed] little practical information for developing an IEP” (p. 171). Furthermore, Gregory found that most teachers did not see the connection between the results of these tests, such as intellectual functioning, and the way in which the teachers developed their IEPs. That said, some researchers (e.g., Fabiano & Haslam, 2020) have argued that further studies are needed to confirm that diagnosis based on the DSM indeed inflates the rate of diagnosis.

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **Personal Experience**

In my personal experience, I have noticed an increase in students accessing special education services, especially through the development of an IEP to be used within the general education classroom. As the number of students with IEPs in my class increases, I have found it more and more challenging to effectively attend to and address everyone’s individual needs that are listed in their IEPs. For example, it is a daily occurrence that I try to provide one-on-one attention to a student, while attending to another three who have stopped working as they require my confirmation that what they are doing is correct before they can continue working, while also reminding two others to stay on task. This type of juggling act in a class of 30 students, 1/3 of which have IEPs that require accommodation and/or modifications, leaves me questioning whether we are truly setting ourselves, and our students up to success or failure.



## **Context**

Canada is identified as a bilingual country having two official languages (French & English), and provides its citizens the choice to pursue their education in either language. In the Province of Ontario, there are 12 French-language school boards and more than 450 French-language schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018). In 2018-2019, which was the most recent data available, there were 86,102 students registered in Junior Kindergarten to grade 8, and 24,992 registered in grades 9-12 in French language schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2020a). In a Core French school, students are being taught the language as if it were their first language (L1), compared to students who attend a French immersion school, or an extended French program, where French is taught to students as if it were their second language (L2) (Lapkin et al, 2009).

### ***French School Boards in Southern Ontario***

**Conseil Scolaire Viamonde (CSV).** This school board is the only secular core French language school board in central south west Ontario with schools from Windsor to Trenton, Niagara and Algonquin park. With more than 13,000 students, the school board consists of 15 secondary schools and 41 elementary schools (ACEPO, 2016). Like every school board, every year, CSV releases a report called *Plan d' éducation d'enfance en difficulté* which can be translated to mean the special education report. In CSV's annual special education report, the school board shares *le nombre d' élèves identifiés par anomalies*, which states the total number of students identified overall, as well as per exceptionality. In 2015-16, 786 students were identified (CSV, 2016); however, this number increased to 807 the following year (CSV, 2017). Although in 2017-2018, the number only rose by one to 808 (CSV, 2018), it then jumped to 949 in 2018-2019 (CSV, 2019) and again to 1174 in 2019-2020 (CSV, 2020). These numbers suggest an increase in IEPs being developed, as well as special education services being utilized.

***Conseil Scolaire Catholique Providence (CSCP)***. This school board is one of the 8 French Catholic school boards in Ontario. This board has more than 10,000 students at 23 elementary schools and seven French-language Catholic secondary schools in Windsor-Essex, Chatham-Kent, Sarnia-Lambton and London-Middlesex-Elgin, among other regions (CBC, 2019; CSCP, 2019a). According to the board's 2018-2019 report, 78.1% of students were said to be 'regular' while the other 21.9% were part of the special education population. Of the students accessing SES, 9.7% were formally identified and 12.2% were not. Of the students who had an IEP, 44.1% were identified by a *comité d'identification, placement et de révision* (CIPR; French board equivalent of an IPRC) committee while 55.9% were not (SCP, 2019b).

Going through the previous reports, I noticed that before 2019, the CSCP school board provided only the number of students who were *identified*, and did so in the form of an amount as opposed to a percentage. Currently, in addition to identified IEPs being shared, students with IEPs who were not formally identified are also being included in the data. Given that the data on unidentified students with IEPs was not previously reported, it is not possible to confirm an increase in number. However, the table below does suggest a steady increase in the number of students identified with IEPs over the last few years.

**Table 2***Data of Students Identified with IEPs with the CSCP school Board*

Academic School Year	Identified Students			Unidentified			Unidentified and Identified
	Elementary	Secondary	Total	Elementary	Secondary	Total	
2010-2011	301	201	502	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2012-2013	389	259	648	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2014-2015	444	321	765	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
2015-2016	453	361	814	610	176	786	1600
2016-2017	474	374	848	663	251	914	1762

Note: CSCP June, 2011; June, 2013; June, 2015; June, 2016; June, 2017

Although the increase in the population of students with IEPs could be a result of an increased registration number, that information is not readily available to the public.

*Ecole Secondaire Catholique de Pain Court (ESCPC)*. Since September 2015, I have worked as a full-time teacher at Ecole Secondaire Catholique de Pain Court (ESCPS). By the end of the 2019-2020 school year, there were approximately 273 students registered at ESCPC. That year, 98 students had an IEP, providing them with access to SES. Sixty-two students were formally identified as exceptional by the IPRC committee and another 36 were unidentified (M. Michaud, personal communication, December 20, 2019). As I previously stated, not all schools necessarily follow the same process when developing an IEP for a student; however, schools within the CSCP schools board are to follow a four phase process explained in their annual Special Education Report, which are described to my understanding below.

Once a concern has been voiced by a parent/guardian, teacher or student themselves, the first phase commences. In this first step, important information is typically collected from parent/guardians, teachers and any person that may contribute in creating a profile for the student. Differentiated teaching strategies are then applied in the hope that there will be sufficient support for the student to show improvement in their learning and academic performance. If these strategies are deemed insufficient, an adaptation plan can be put into place by the special education resources team in consultation with the parents/guardians and principal. Typically, the adaptation plan is put into place for a period of six weeks with the purpose of determining set strategies that may better help a student succeed. For issues related to behaviour, an observation form, Formulaire B, is to be filled out (CSCP, 2019b).

In the next phase, what is known as the *comité interne*, which could be compared to the in-school support team (SST) (TDSB, 2019), will meet with the purpose of discussing the data collected and interventions applied during the first phase. Recommendations are also made to help with student success. Typically, this committee consists of a member of the administration, the special education teacher, and at the grade school level, the classroom teacher. In some secondary schools, the SST may also include the school-based special education Curriculum Leader (CL) or Assistant Curriculum Leader (ACL) (TDSB, 2019). The student in question and their parent(s)/guardian(s) are invited, but not obligated to participate in any meetings.

During this second phase, the resource teacher can conduct informal assessments in order to better understand the student's strengths and needs, and determine appropriate interventions. Examples of informal assessments approved by the CSCP (2019b) school board are listed in their annual special education report. At ESCPC in particular, the diagnostic assessment used is the *Test de rendement Francophone (TRF)* that looks at four domains including writing comprehension,

vocabulary and spelling, mathematics, and problem solving, which is listed in the board's special education report along with l' *Echelle francophone d' appréciation du rendement (EFAR)*. The resource teacher can then offer indirect support (such as identifying teaching strategies) to the student's teachers. In some cases, the student can work one-on-one with the resource teacher to help with the student's learning strategies. If curriculum modifications are necessary or different expectations are targeted, an IEP *must* be developed for the student. In which case, the committee can then recommend any of the following: additional assessments; or consultations with a social worker or speech-language pathologist (CSCP, 2019b).

In the third phase, the *comité externe* also known as the SST becomes involved. This team includes members of the *comité interene* in addition to l' *enseignant responsable de la réussite des élèves (ERRÉ)* translated as a student success teacher; a guidance counsellor (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017c); one or more members from the *équipe clinique* or professional support services team and a special education advisor or *conseiller EED*. At this phase, the committee seeks support from outside the school (whether that be from a professional from the school board or an external agency) and services, and modifications and/or revisions are recommended. The special education advisor will reach out to a school board psychologist who conducts psycho-educational assessment, which is shared with the parents and school (CSCP, 2019b). The following are examples of approved psychological evaluation tools: Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence, Fourth Edition (WPPSI-IV); Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children, Fifth Edition (WISC-V); Échelle d'intelligence de Wechsler pour enfants, cinquième édition (WISC); Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale, Fourth Edition (WAIS-V); Wechsler Individual Achievement Test, Second Edition (WIAT-II); Adaptive Behaviour Assessment System, Second Edition (ABAS-II), (CSCP, 2019b).

During the fourth phase, the *comité d'identification de placement de révision (CIPR)* or IPRC committee intervenes. This committee is made up of the superintendent or principal, the resource or special education teacher, the student success teacher (SST), the guidance counsellor, and the classroom teacher in elementary schools, as well as any other people that the principal and/or parent think could contribute. Recommendations by the psychologist are reviewed, the necessary forms are filled out and the child's placement is decided. This is then reviewed by the IPRC committee every year (CSCP, 2019b). At ESCPC, all IEPs (identified and non-identified) are reviewed twice (once a semester) a year by the SST, as well as the student's parents/guardians and teacher(s). Parents must be notified of and sign off on any changes made to the IEP. There is a window of approximately 30 days to make changes to the IEP before it is signed and placed into the student's *dossier scolaire de l'Ontario (DSO)* or Ontario Student Record (OSR) (CSCP, 2019b). All information is recorded and updated through the Ontario Ministry of Education platform (M. Michaud, personal communication, December 20, 2019).

***Personal Experience in the Classroom.*** Within my time teaching at ESCPC, I have noticed an increase in the number of students with an IEP. For the purpose of this paper, I decided to focus on specific classes as the subjects and streams I have taught have not always been consistent. Below, I provide the data for the IEPs (identified and non-identified) since 2015. As my class sizes have changed from year to year, I have focused on the percentage rather than the unit figures. I have taught the grade 9 academic French (FRA1D) and grade 10 academic French (FRA2D) since my first year. Specifically, for my grade 10 French class, the number of IEPs would suggest an increase in the need for special education support over the years. For the first two years of my career, 0% of my class had IEPs. However, that has changed considerably over the last couple of years. In 2017, that 0% jumped to 15%, then to 20% in 2018-2019, and finally to 32% this past

academic year (2019-2020). For the grade 9 French class, there were zero IEPs for the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years; however, this changed in the subsequent years with 24% of students having an IEP in 2017-2018, 20% in 2018-2019, and 15% in 2019-2020.

Some years, I have had more identified students than not using special education services while other years it has varied. However, what is consistent over the last five years is that the exceptionality I see most often is the *trouble d'apprentissage* or learning disability in English, which is part of the Communication category. Not only is this the most common exceptionality within my classroom and school, but throughout my school board (CSCP, 2019b). Interestingly, studies, such as Clandfield (2014), have demonstrated this same trend. As for specific accommodations, I most often see the following on my students' IEPs: quiet space to work in; proximity to the teacher; more time to process information; reminders to pay attention; reducing number of tasks; and, technological assistance.

## **Challenges**

### ***Access to Resources***

There are many obstacles that make the provision of special education even more challenging. For one, at our school board there is a considerable delay in having students assessed by a psychologist. Specifically, there are only two special education advisors as well as two school psychologists assigned to 15 schools, which has led a long list of students waiting to be assessed. Moreover, according to the CSCP annual special education reports, the wait time for assessment is ever increasing. In the 2010-2011 academic school year, the wait time to see a psychologist was 12 months (CSCP, 2011); however, in the 2019 report, the wait time was listed as 16 months (CSCP, 2019b). There is always the option for students to obtain an assessment through a psychologist in the community; however, these assessments are costly to

parents/guardians and as such, more than the majority of psychological assessments for students within CSCP are done by a school board psychologist.

### ***Lack of Training***

When I started my career in teaching and began working with students with exceptionalities, I felt unprepared. I found myself experiencing situations that I believe my preservice teacher education program could have better prepared me for. I graduated from the Faculty of Education at the University of Laurentian, and in my one year at teacher's college, a single class that was three hours, once a week, was dedicated to special education. The course was called *Enfance en difficulté*. I remember reviewing the history of special education, the legislation, looking briefly at the types of exceptionalities that existed, and the identification process. We looked over some examples of an IEP, but never developed one together, which would have been very helpful. Every day as an educator, I work with IEPs and yet having graduated from teacher's college I was uncomfortable with the IEP, only really understanding the theory of the document as opposed to its implementation. Furthermore, the professor, although extremely competent, had not been teaching at the elementary or secondary school level for over 20 years. The class was very theoretical, and yet, practical knowledge would have been more helpful to prepare us to work with students with exceptionalities. Furthermore, it is my opinion that the strategies and suggestions shared with us were not realistic for the 20<sup>th</sup> century student. I also believe that it would have been helpful during my practicum to have worked with students with special education needs/, IEPs, and the school support team to have first-hand experience, as well as to have been able to ask questions in real time.

During my masters, I completed a Special Education and Language acquisition class. As per the University of Windsor's website regarding this course, it was noted that: "students will



critically examine a range of current research, and draw conclusions about the discourse on the relationship between language acquisition, perceived learning disabilities, and special education support” (paragraph 21). The course was very interesting and provided insight into many larger issues surrounding special education, and was one of my favourite courses of my entire educational career. The concepts that I learned in that course were generalizable to the classroom, and they helped me to understand how to approach each student individually and with a different perspective.

When I started working at my school board, we did not receive much training in special education. We had one training day dedicated to special education through the *Programme d’insertion professionnelle du nouveau personnel enseignant (PIPNE)* or the New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) in English. I personally found the information provided to be dated and not helpful for today’s classrooms. However, when I started at my school, I was fortunate enough to have a mentor who was very knowledgeable in special education. She guided me through my special education concerns alongside our SST. Anecdotally, I have heard of other school boards offering more extensive training to their new teachers. As educators, we do have the option of taking an additional qualification course for Special Education parts 1, 2, and 3 at our own expense. This is something I intend to do in the future to hopefully gain a more comprehensive understanding of special education.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Future Research in Special Education**

Although there are many different areas of special education that require future research, I will discuss a few specific topics that I find personally relevant as a teacher. One of the main areas of study lacking in Canada that would help to improve special education in the future is “large

scale research to build better policy”, as stated by Julia O’Sullivan, the dean of the University of Toronto’s Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) (University of Toronto News, 2014, paragraph 1). Specifically, research on how to improve learning for children with disabilities like hearing, vision and cognitive impairments, as well as learning and mental health disabilities will help to build better strategies in special education policies.

Further studies are also needed related to the IEP, both in terms of the education program and document. Whether it be on the IEP as a product (Rotter, 2014), its elaboration and use (Tremblay & Belley, 2017), or its effectiveness (Shaddock et al., 2009), the literature suggests further studies are essential to fully understanding the IEP. Furthermore, although inclusive education appears to be the model in Canada, additional research needs to be conducted that looks at inclusion through a special education lens. For example, studies that examine teacher preparation to support students from the special education population (Rosenberg & Walther-Thomas, 2014; Spooner et al., 2010), particularly in the general classroom (Liu, 2015) are necessary. Specifically, studies should focus on effective teacher training and inclusion to determine how to successfully educate teachers on inclusive values and implementation strategies (Braunsteiner & Mariano, 2018). This information would support pre-service and in-service teachers to be better equipped to address and support students with special education needs within their classrooms.

When going through the literature, I noticed a significant amount of research relating to special education and French Immersion schools; however, it is my understanding that additional research is required in the area of special education and core French language programs. As stated by Arnett (2003): “Little consideration has been offered to the educational experience of students with LD and other challenges in core French programs, despite evidence that core French teachers

are actively contemplating the best ways to meet these students' needs in the classroom and if they can successfully do so within their program" (p.174). For one, the need for further research on inclusion is especially true in second or foreign language classrooms (Arnett, 2003). As Arnett (2003) notes, in second language classrooms, the language "is both the process and the product of learning" (p.174), which requires adaptive strategies to teach in a manner that meets the needs of all students, including those with a learning disability. Also, further studies need to be performed to determine the language (French or English) that is most suitable for the delivery of special education programs and services (Wise, 2012).

Finally, when looking at the language of special education, some studies (e.g., Miltra, 2006; Vehmas, 2010) have suggested that there is no consensus regarding definitions of special education terms, such as "special needs". This could, therefore, be another next step in the realm of special education research.

### **Conclusion**

From the literature that I have reviewed, and from my personal experience, it is my understanding that the population of students accessing special education resources is growing. Although there are several different theories in the existing literature that attempt to explain the growth in special education needs in Ontario's classrooms, some of the main reasons for this rise include the challenges related to the IEP, inconsistency in special education terminology and attitudes, and a lack of understanding of special education and its resources. However, as the number of IEPs (specifically for unidentified students) increases, I believe it is important to reflect on what accommodations require the development of an IEP and what constitutes normal differentiated teaching strategies that can be available to all students without the need of a legal document. We all have different learning needs and from what I understand, an inclusive

environment is the next step in fostering a learning environment that responds to the needs of every student. That said, as inclusion becomes the model of choice for the Canadian education system, further attention must be given to the practical implication for students in special education.

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## APPENDIX A

### GLOSSARY

**ACCOMMODATIONS:** Accommodations (such as specific teaching strategies and assistive technology) allow a student access to the subject or course without any changes to the knowledge and skills the student is expected to demonstrate (Ontario Schools Kindergarten to Grade 12, Policy and Program Requirements p. 41.)

**ALTERNATIVE EXPECTATIONS:** Alternative expectations are developed to help students with special education needs acquire knowledge and skills that are not represented in the Ontario curriculum. Because they are not part of a subject or course outlined in the provincial curriculum documents, alternative expectations are considered to constitute alternative programs or alternative courses (see section 7.4). At the secondary level, the student will not be granted a credit for the successful completion of a course that consists of alternative expectations (Ontario Schools Kindergarten to Grade 12, Policy and Program Requirements, p. 42).

**BEHAVIORAL EXCEPTIONALITY:** A learning disorder characterized by specific behaviour problems over such a period of time, and to such a marked degree, and of such a nature, as to adversely affect educational performance and that may be accompanied by one or more of the following: a. an inability to build or to maintain interpersonal relationships; b. excessive fears or anxieties; c. a tendency to compulsive reaction; d. an inability to learn that cannot be traced to intellectual, sensory, or other health factors, or any combination thereof. (Ontario Schools Kindergarten to Grade 12, Policy and Program Requirements, A14)

**COMMUNICATION EXCEPTIONALITY:**

**Autism:** A severe learning disorder that is characterized by:

- a. disturbances in: rate of educational development; ability to relate to the environment; mobility; perception, speech, and language;
- b. lack of the representational symbolic behaviour that precedes language
- b. lack of the representational symbolic behaviour that precedes language.

**Deaf and Hard of Hearing:** An impairment characterized by deficits in language and speech development because of a diminished or non-existent auditory response to sound.

**Language Impairment:** A learning disorder characterized by an impairment in comprehension and/or the use of verbal communication or the written or other symbol system of communication, which may be associated with neurological, psychological, physical, or sensory factors, and which may:

- a. involve one or more of the form, content, and function of language in communication; and
- b. include one or more of: language delay; dysfluency; voice and articulation development, which may or may not be organically or functionally based.

**Learning Disability:** One of a number of neurodevelopmental disorders that persistently and significantly has an impact on the ability to learn and use academic and other skills and that:

- a. affects the ability to perceive or process verbal or non-verbal information in an effective and accurate manner in students who have assessed intellectual abilities that are at least in the average range;
- b. results in (a) academic underachievement that is inconsistent with the intellectual abilities of the student (which are at least in the average range), and/or (b) academic achievement that can be maintained by the student only with extremely high levels of effort and/or with additional support;

- c. results in difficulties in the development and use of skills in one or more of the following areas: reading, writing, mathematics, and work habits and learning skills;
- d. may typically be associated with difficulties in one or more cognitive processes, such as phonological processing; memory and attention; processing speed; perceptual motor processing; visual-spatial processing; executive functions (e.g., self-regulation of behaviour and emotions, planning, organizing of thoughts and activities, prioritizing, decision making);
- e. may be associated with difficulties in social interaction (e.g., difficulty in understanding social norms or the point of view of others); with various other conditions or disorders, diagnosed or undiagnosed; or with other exceptionalities;
- f. is not the result of a lack of acuity in hearing and/or vision that has not been corrected; intellectual disabilities; socio-economic factors; cultural differences; lack of proficiency in the language of instruction; lack of motivation or effort; gaps in school attendance or inadequate opportunity to benefit from instruction. (Ontario Schools Kindergarten to Grade 12, Policy and Program Requirements, A15-A16)

**DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION (DI):** A method of teaching that attempts to adapt instruction to suit the differing strengths and needs, interests, learning styles, and readiness to learn of individual students. (Ontario Schools Kindergarten to Grade 12, Policy and Program Requirements, G3)

**DIVERSITY:** The presence of a wide range of human qualities and attributes within a group, organization, or society. The dimensions of diversity include, but are not limited to, ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion,

sex, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status. (Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, 2009, p. 4).

**EQUITY:** A condition or state of fair, inclusive, and respectful treatment of all people. Equity does not mean treating people the same without regard for individual differences. (Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, 2009, p. 4).

**EXCEPTIONAL PUPIL:** a pupil whose behavioural, communicational, intellectual, physical or multiple exceptionalities are such that he or she is considered to need placement in a special education program by a committee. (Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide, p. 19)

**IDENTIFICATION, PLACEMENT, AND REVIEW COMMITTEE (IPRC):** A committee of a school board that decides whether or not a child should be identified as exceptional, identifies the areas of a student's exceptionality according to the categories and definitions of exceptionalities provided by the ministry, decides an appropriate placement for a student, and reviews the identification and placement at least once in each school year. (Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide, p. 242)

**IDENTIFIED:** A student that has been identified as "exceptional" through the IPRC process and formal assessment documental indicating an exceptionality (Rainy River District School Board, Special Education Terms Used in Ontario School Boards).

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:** Education that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected. (Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, 2009, p. 4).



**INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLAN (IEP):** A written plan describing the special education program and/or services required by a particular student, including a record of the particular accommodations needed to help the student achieve his or her learning expectations. An IEP must be developed for a student who has been identified as exceptional by an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC), and may also be developed for a student who has special education needs but has not been identified as exceptional. An IEP is a working document that identifies learning expectations that may be modified from or alternative to the expectations given in the curriculum policy document for the appropriate grade and subject or course. It outlines the specific knowledge and skills to be assessed and evaluated for the purpose of reporting student achievement. (Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide, 2007, G4)

**INTELLECTUAL EXCEPTIONALITY:**

**Developmental Disability:** A severe learning disorder characterized by:

- a. an inability to profit from a special education program for students with mild intellectual disabilities because of slow intellectual development;
- b. an ability to profit from a special education program that is designed to accommodate slow intellectual development;
- c. a limited potential for academic learning, independent social adjustment, and economic self-support. (Ontario Schools Kindergarten to Grade 12, Policy and Program Requirements, A16)

**Giftedness:** An unusually advanced degree of general intellectual ability that requires differentiated learning experiences of a depth and breadth beyond those normally provided in the

regular school program to satisfy the level of educational potential indicated. (Ontario Schools Kindergarten to Grade 12, Policy and Program Requirements, A16)

**Mild Intellectual Disability:** A learning disorder characterized by:

- a. an ability to profit educationally within a regular class with the aid of considerable curriculum modification and support services;
- b. an inability to profit educationally within a regular class because of slow intellectual development;
- c. a potential for academic learning, independent social adjustment, and economic self-support. (Ontario Schools Kindergarten to Grade 12, Policy and Program Requirements, A16)

**LEARNING DISABILITY:** refers to a variety of disorders that affect the acquisition, retention, understanding, organization or use of verbal and/or non-verbal information. These disorders result from impairments in one or more psychological processes related to learning (a), in combination with otherwise average abilities essential for thinking and reasoning. Learning disabilities are specific not global impairments and as such are distinct from intellectual disabilities.

**MODIFICATIONS:** changes made to the grade-level expectations for a subject or course in order to meet a student's learning needs. Modifications may include the use of expectations at a different grade level and/or an increase or decrease in the number and/or complexity of expectations relative to the curriculum expectations for the regular grade level. At the secondary level, the principal will determine whether achievement of the modified expectations constitutes successful completion of the course, and will decide whether the student will be eligible to receive a credit for the course. The principal will communicate his or her decision to the parents and the student (Ontario Schools Kindergarten to Grade 12, Policy and Program Requirements p. 41.)

**MULTIPLE EXCEPTIONALITIES:** A combination of learning or other disorders, impairments, or physical disabilities that is of such a nature as to require, for educational achievement, the services of one or more teachers holding qualifications in special education and the provision of support services appropriate for such disorders, impairments, or disabilities. (Ontario Schools Kindergarten to Grade 12, Policy and Program Requirements, A16)

**NON\_IDENTIFIED:** A student that has an IEP and accesses Special Education Services, but has NOT been formally identified as an “exceptional student (Rainy River District School Board, Special Education Terms Used in Ontario School Boards).

**NON-NORMATIVE:** classrooms and programmes of children diagnosed and placed not on the basis of universally agreed-upon physical criteria, but rather on the basis of observations and evaluations of their classroom behaviour, in some cases supplemented by psychological reports and standardized “aptitude” or “intelligence” tests. This second group contained students labeled as “behavioural,” “slow learners,” “learning disabled,” “overemotional,” minimal brain dysfunctional,’ ‘attention deficit disorder,’ and so forth. (Clandsfield, 2014, p. 115 retrieved from Tomlinson)

**NORMATIVE GROUP:** students who are truly handicapped in such a way that few would deny that special services are appropriate. Children were diagnosed and placed in these programmes on the basis of norms or criteria that were objectively developed and universally applied. or example, children, those with significant or total hearing loss, those who are severely physically handicapped, and those who are seriously or profoundly retarded.(Clandsfield, 2014, p. 115 retrieved from Tomlinson)

**PHYSICAL EXCEPTIONALITY:**

a. **Physical Disability:** A condition of such severe physical limitation or deficiency as to require special assistance in learning situations to provide the opportunity for educational achievement equivalent to that of students without exceptionalities who are of the same age or development level.

b. **Blind and Low Vision:** A condition of partial or total impairment of sight or vision that even with correction affects educational performance adversely. (Ontario Schools Kindergarten to Grade 12, Policy and Program Requirements, A16)

**A SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR AN EXCEPTIONAL PUPIL:** an educational program that is based on and modified by the results of continuous assessment and evaluation and that includes a plan containing special objectives and an outline of educational services that meets the needs of the exceptional pupil. (Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide, p. 19)

**SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES ARE:** facilities and resources, including support personnel and equipment, necessary for developing and implementing a special education program. (Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide, p. 19)

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